MEMORIES

'Dream Girl'... The first lady of second marriages... Heartthrob of the nation... Woman of substance! Images, all synonymous with just one person – Hema Malini.

She reigned as undisputed queen of hearts and the box-office, for well over a decade. A track record that didn't exist in the past, till Madame Malini came along, and has yet to be broken.

CINÉ BLITZ recaptures that magic of Hema Malini!

She was born on October 16, 1948, in a remote little village in Tamil Nadu. But thanks to her father, who was working with the State Insurance Corporation, Hema grew up in Delhi. Little did she or her family know, what her future held. That one day, little Hema would become an icon.

It was barely two months after she was born, that she was taken off to Delhi. At the tender age of six, she began to learn classical dancing. "By the time I was eight, I was already performing in a lot of shows. A number of Indian and foreign dignitaries came to see my performance," she recalls. People like Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Queen Elizabeth and Dr Rajendra Prasad. As a child, she often performed at the Bharatiya Bhavan in New Delhi. Just goes to show, Hema was star material even as a child!

As a result of these shows, a Tamil film maker offered Hema her first role, when she was just 14. "I was too young, that wasn't the age to be a heroine. Besides, the role did not suit me. Since I was brought up in the North, I found it difficult to speak in Tamil so I backed out of this film." However, Hema did perform a couple of dance numbers, in obscure Telugu films like *Idusatyam* and *Pandava-Vanavasan*.

It was then that film maker Ananthaswami happened to notice Hema, who was just 16. "He asked me if I would like to do Hindi films and I said yes. Hindi wasn't as much of a problem as Tamil was. He brought me to Bombay and I was offered a role opposite Raj Kapoor in *Sapnon Ka Saudagar*. As I wasn't from the film industry, I wasn't nervous working opposite Raj Kapoor. I wasn't in awe of him. I just calmly agreed to do the film. Had I been part of the film industry, I may have been nervous." It's this same calm nature that helped Hema see a long innings.

"Sanjeev and Jeetendra proposed to me..."

"I was constantly working with Dharam, so naturally, a romance was bound to happen."

After six months of learning Urdu, Hema was on her way to becoming a star. Once she bagged *Sapnon Ka Saudagar*, Hema signed a contract with Ananthaswami for five films. "Looking back, I feel I may have lost quite a few good films with B.R. Chopra, J. /Om Prakash. Due to Ananthaswami, no producer could approach me directly. All offers and scripts went through him. If he felt a role did not suit me, he would reject it. At that time, I felt he was harassing me but today, I feel it did me a lot of good."

The five-film contract included *Waris* with Jeetendra, *Abhinetri* and *Jahan Pyar Mile* with Shashi Kapoor, *Tum Haseen Main Jawan* and *Sharafat* with Dharmendra. "As I said, I used to get irritated with Ananthswami, since he prevented me from accepting other offers. My mother used to deal with him. Then he began to act very strangely, in spite of being a lawyer-cum-secretary. He was extremely strict with me but also had total faith in me. He knew I would become a star. He created that 'unapproachable' image for me. Ananthaswami always maintained that I would be a bigger star than Vyjayanthimala."

He was also responsible for giving Hema the 'Dream Girl' tag. "Yes, he and his publicist, created a very different kind of publicity gimmick. Nobody enjoyed such publicity as I did. Though he was bad, I gained something from him. He has passed away now. I hope nobody ever signs the rigid contract I did."

To date, Hema feels that *Seeta Aur Geeta* was her most memorable film. "It was a challenge for me. I was completing the shooting of *Andaaz* with Ramesh Sippy and at that time, *Ram Aur Shyam* was doing very well. So Ramesh told me he wanted to make the female version with me and I agreed. It was very exciting because it was my first double role, one of a docile girl and the other of a tomboy. Ramesh said I would have to put in a lot of hard work and I was ready to.

"During rehearsals I was dull and lifeless, and they began to doubt me. But when I gave a take I was completely different, so I got labelled a 'take' artist. Everyone was very involved with the making of *Seeta Aur Geeta*. It was the turning point of my career, besides being scriptwriters Salim and Javed's first big hit." The film catapulted Hema to dizzy heights of super stardom. Apart from her and the scriptwriters, it gave director Ramesh Sippy, Dharmendra and the late Sanjeev Kumar, a much needed career boost.

Hema felt that she and her 'He Man', Dharmendra, had only worked in 12 to 15 films. But I corrected her, saying they've done 30-odd films together. Fairly surprised, Hema burst into peals of giggles. "How do you know? Do you have a record?" I had to admit that I did!

Another film Hema enjoyed, was *Johnny Mera Naam* with Dev Anand. "I think it was released in the same year as *Seeta Aur Geeta*. This was the first film I worked in, with Dev Anand and Vijay Anand. It was so different from working for Ramesh Sippy or Pramod Chakraborty. It was nice to work with people who repeated me. Pramod made *Naya Zamana*, *Jugnu*, *Azaad*, *Dream Girl*, *Jyoti*, *Nastik* and *Barood*, in which I did a brief role."

Romantically speaking, one would have thought that Hema had done quite a few romantic films with the love of her life, Dharmendra. "No way," she laughs. "It's very sad that we never did any romantic films together. I have done more romantic films with Rajesh Khanna than with Dharam!

"Dharam wanted to make *Heer Ranjha* with me, especially since his film *Pratigya* was such a big hit. Unfortunately, it didn't materialise. It would have been nice had we done one." I informed her that *Charas* was quite romantic. "Yes, it was light and romantic. We also did *Dost* but it wasn't romantic. I played a half-cracked and stupid girl, while Dharam played a mature man who made me

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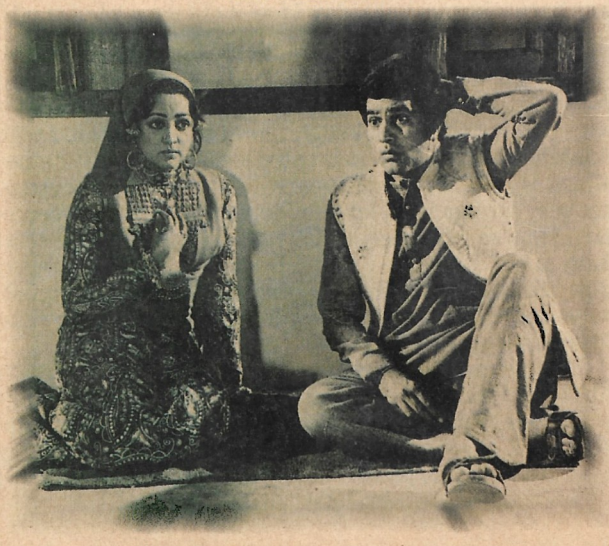

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"Doing a romantic scene with Shashi was difficult."

realise my stupidity.

"*Baghawat* was our last film together but *Jaan Hatheli Pe,* unintentionally became the last. It went on and on for years, and was released later. *Razia Sultan* began in '75 or '76. That was a historical romance. It took so long in the making. They shot, scrapped it and re-shot. Finance was a problem with them. *Samrat* was a rather funny film. *The Burning Train*, though it was different, wasn't a great film."

That reminds me of *Aandhi Toofan*, the female version of *Sholay,* where she played Sanjeev Kumar's role. Laughing, "You certainly remember more of my films than I do. Yes, I did a good dance number in it and yes, I played a similar character but I had my hands intact!"

Going back to Dharmendra and Hema, their pairing created waves at the box-office. "We started work on two films simultaneously – *Tum Haseen Main Jawan* and *Sharafat* – doing two shifts then.

"We did a lot of action films together. He was an action hero. But I haven't done many outstanding films with Dharam, except for *Seeta Aur Geeta*, *Sholay* and *Razia Sultan*.

"Ramesh Sippy was the only one who succeeded in bringing out some of my talent. The others only utilised me. I feel bad that nobody really tapped my potential. *Lal Patthar* was a different film. I played a character with negative shades, out to ruin somebody. I enjoyed it because it wasn't monotonous, like some of the characters I played. I was playing similar characters with either Shashi Kapoor or Jeetendra. With Rajesh Khanna I had some good roles but not with Dharam. It would have been nice to remember those good films but we never did any."

May 2, is their wedding anniversary... "You know so much, you should do the interview!" But I insist that she tell me about the romance. "It's so boring. People will think I have nothing else to talk about. Because I was constantly working with Dharam, naturally, a romance was bound to happen. Besides, I was at that age. Now I cannot fall in love, because that mood has gone. Of course, Dharam was very handsome and good looking. It is every woman's dream to get a good looking husband, one who's also very nice. When you first meet a man, you should feel nice and that he's right for you, irrespective of whether he's rich or poor."

Hema was probably the first lady to break the dictates of society and marry her much-married dream man. Fortunately there wasn't an uproar, since she conducted herself in a quiet and dignified manner. In fact, both families did just that. "Now it has become a style. But I still say, 'do what you feel is right and do what you like to do'. If there is a similar situation, I will advise people to do it in a dignified manner. After all, it is love. You can't tell your heart not to love someone."

So the marriage took place and soon, the babies arrived. Esha on November 2 and Ahana on July 28. Today, they are in their teens and both representing the state of Maharashtra in a handball tournament in Sholapur. Hema's eyes gleam as she speaks lovingly of her daughters. You can tell that she's a completely happy lady. What makes her happier, is that Dharmendra's sons, Sunny and Bobby, dote on their kid sisters. They lavish them with gifts, chocolates and whatever else. "Both Sunny and Bobby are very fond of Esha and Ahana. When Dharam and I got married, people expected a lot of tamasha. Fortunately, we do not discuss family matters outside the house, everything has been kept within."

But Hema, the heartthrob of the nation, also had quite a few suitors within the industry, "Yes, there was Sanjeev Kumar and Jeetendra, who had previously proposed to me."

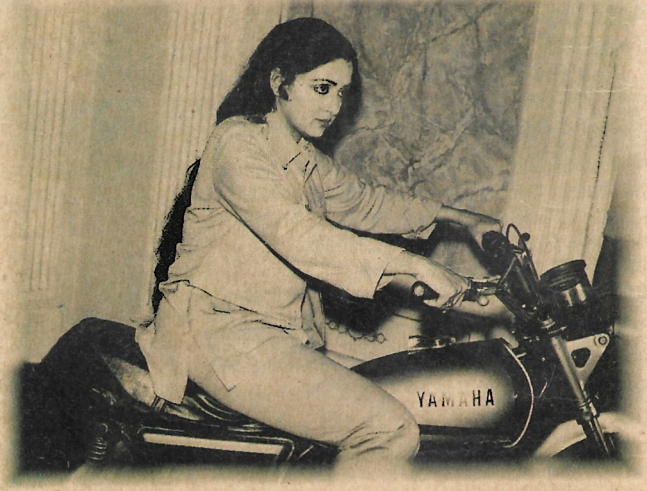
And of course, there was Girish Karnad... 'Well, mummy wanted me to marry him. She even made a film, *Ratnadeep,* to bring us together."

Among her colleagues, Hema enjoyed working with Shashi Kapoor. "Especially in *Abhinetri*. The film was based on me, a stage dancer. Another film we did was *Jahan Pyar Mile*. It has not yet been screened on TV. Shashi was very talkative and sweet, and I liked working with him. We did a lot of films together. He was very mischievous. He used to tease me a lot and doing a romantic film with him was difficult. He would always make fun of me.

"With Rajesh, I started with *Andaaz*, followed by *Prem Nagar*, *Kudrat, Dard* and *Mehbooba*. *Kudrat* was a lovely film by Chetan Anand. I loved working with him. When we were shooting for *Kudrat* in Shimla, my father was with me. I think that was his last trip with me.

"Since I was doing so many films with Rajesh, Dimple used to come along on location. We got very friendly and developed a lovely relationship. We looked forward to meeting each other. Sad that she gave up her career for

"I enjoyed doing my own stunts..."



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"Dharam and I did a lot of action movies."

him. Dimple was so young and beautiful. Of course, today, things have changed.

"Jeetendra and I did several films together. *Dulhan*, *Khushboo* and *Kinara*, were the memorable ones. Dev Anand and I also did several films together, of which, I enjoyed *Johnny Mera Naam*. Today, I am doing *Censor* with him. He is such a sweet man. Feroz Khan and I did two films together; *Dharmatma* was a very nice film, while *Sharafat Chod De Maine* was terrible."

Surprisingly, Amitabh and Hema did *Gehri Chaal* and then *Kasauti*. That was in the early '70s. But it was only in 1980 thereafter, that they did another film, *Naseeb*. "Yes. I also did *Desh Premee*, *Nastik* and *Satte Pe Satta*. I don't know why we didn't do any films for five years."

Before I complete this memorable interview, I inquire about her rather action-oriented image. Hema always fought the baddies on screen. "Yes, maybe because of my strong personality. I used to fight in almost every film. Audiences liked my fight sequences." Hema also performed some of her daring stunts herself. She admits, "I did my own stunts very often, except if it got too risky. I have never been injured, though my knee did have water retention. I would do my dances and do my steps but in films, I had to do the same stunts over and over again. All those re-takes took their toll. Like any player, my knee hurt. So I had it operated on and now it's okay."

Today, Hema Malini can be termed the complete woman, who has seen and done things other women only aspire to. She's a mother, wife, actress, producer and director. "I'll go wherever my destiny takes me. You can't plan anything. Who knows what tomorrow has in store for me?"

Exactly. Que sera, sera!

Keith D'Costa